

**RASSELAS: PRINCE
OF ABYSSINIA**

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Rasselas: Prince of Abyssinia by Samuel Johnson

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SAMUEL JOHNSON

**RASSELAS: PRINCE
OF ABYSSINIA**

Albert
from
Papa.

Christmas 1891.

RASSELAS

By SAMUEL JOHNSON

For a model of grave and majestic language, "Rasselas" will claim perhaps the first place in English composition; nor do I recollect any work of the kind that contains so many profound reflections, and, with occasional reserve as to their generality, so many true ones. — LITTLE HUNT.

RASSELAS
PRINCE OF ABYSSINIA

BY
SAMUEL JOHNSON, LL.D.

New American Edition



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A. C. McCLURG AND COMPANY
1889

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PREFATORY NOTE.

[ABRIDGED FROM BOSWELL'S JOHNSON.]

“SOON after this event,¹ Johnson wrote his ‘*Rasselas*.’² The late Mr. Strahan, the printer, told me that Johnson wrote it that with the profits he might defray the expense of his mother’s funeral, and pay some little debts which she had left. He told Sir Joshua Reynolds that he composed it in the evenings of one week, sent it to the press in portions as it was written, and had never since read it over.³ Mr. Strahan, Mr. Johnston, and Mr. Dodsley purchased it for a hundred pounds, but afterwards paid him twenty-five pounds more, when it came to a second edition. . . . We cannot but wonder at the very low price which he was content to receive for this admirable performance, which, though he had written nothing else, would have rendered his name immortal in the world of literature. None of his writings has been so extensively diffused over Europe; for it has

¹ The death of Johnson’s mother, which occurred in January, 1759.

² “*Rasselas*” was published in March or April, 1759.

³ Just before his death, however, he one day chanced to see the book in Boswell’s hands, and “seized upon it with avidity.”

been translated into most, if not all, of the modern languages.

"This tale, with all the charms of Oriental imagery, and all the force and beauty of which the English language is capable, leads us through the most important scenes of human life, and shows us that this stage of our being is full of 'vanity and vexation of spirit.' To those who look no further than the present life, or who maintain that human nature has not fallen from the state in which it was created, the instruction of this sublime story will be of no avail. But they who think justly and feel with sensibility will listen with eagerness and admiration to its truth and wisdom. Voltaire's 'Candide,' written to refute the system of Optimism, which it has accomplished with brilliant success, is wonderfully similar in its plan and conduct to Johnson's 'Rasselas;' insomuch, that I have heard Johnson say that if they had not been published so closely one after the other that there was not time for imitation, it would have been in vain to deny that the scheme of that which came latest was taken from the other. Though the proposition illustrated by both these works was the same, — namely, that in our present state there is more evil than good, — the intention of the writers was very different. Voltaire, I am afraid, meant only by wanton profaneness to obtain a sportive victory over religion, and to discredit the belief of a superintending Providence; Johnson meant, by showing the unsatisfactory nature of things temporal, to direct the hopes of man to things eternal. 'Rasselas' . . . may be considered as a more enlarged and more deeply philosophical discourse in prose upon the interesting truth which in his 'Vanity of Human Wishes' he had so successfully enforced in verse.